

# AT A CROSSROADS

It may have started in America but countries around the world are not immune from the fall-out of Bushian 'war on terror' as they struggle hard to fight for America's gambit and brace for the worst. It's all about forcing people to look at 'terror' in an American way. With the UN Security Council declaring Lashkar-e-Tayyaba's frontal outfit Jammat-ud-Dawa, a terrorist organisation and its top leaders as dreaded terrorists, the Sultans of Delhi seem to have heaved an audible sigh of relief. After all Uncle Sam has finally taken it into serious consideration—India's contention of Pakistan-originated terror. And all political parties, left and right alike, are united on the issue of 'war on terror' particularly after the ghastly Mumbai tragedy. Even the marxist left does not see much beyond the November strikes in Mumbai. Pakistan earlier fought America's war against the Soviets in Afghanistan and, its military establishment under the late Zia-ul-Huq benefited enormously. Then the equation changed radically after 9/11 and Pakistan's Generals had no option but to continue Bush's campaign against the Afghan-Taliban and their own people only to see, rather helplessly, Pakistan losing its sovereignty bit by bit to America. The situation has reached such a stage where even China could have a strategic stake in bringing peace to its neighbour Afghanistan. In that event China, otherwise a close ally of Pakistan may send troops to fight the Taliban under the UN peace-keeping mission. The possibility cannot be ruled out altogether as Beijing has reportedly deployed 10,000 troops abroad to UN missions, mainly in Africa. No doubt New Delhi is enjoying the moment because Pakistan's proxy war in Kashmir through jihadists like LeT is in jeopardy. After American somersault their territorial ambition in Kashmir as also in Afghanistan gets a jolt. Not very long ago politicians and Generals in Pakistan used to describe Kashmiri terrorists (or jihadists) as 'freedom fighters'. Not any more.

For all practical purposes Pakistan is in a bind now as even UN Security Council despite China's presence cannot salvage their diplomatic double-dealing in denying their covert involvement in cross-border terrorism. As the administration of Pakistan looks divided over how to make adjustments with USA without losing their age-old leverage over Kashmir, India may derive comfort for sometime from the fast changing geo-political context in the region.

Why Afghanistan is so vital in American strategic calculation deserves serious attention. The Pentagon's plan of controlling the Khybar Pass inhabited by Pashtun ethnic groups, otherwise related to the Afghan Taliban and al-Qaeda, is aimed at making the all important Pass an alternative route for logistical supplies to the troops in Afghanistan and erecting an oil pipeline running from the Caspian Sea to the Indian Ocean, a project to follow the Turke-menistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan route. If American business strategy is hurt in any sector of the region, they won't hesitate to dump their old client states. So Pakistan is getting wrong signals and veiled threat as well. The hard reality is that there's much less enmity between President-elect Obama and his predecessor Bush when it is the question of tackling Afghan theatre.

Meanwhile India's much publicised programme to get cheap oil from Iran through Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline will remain shelved. The Mumbai terror strike has come as a Twin-Towers-type pretext to cap the pipeline project once and for all. Instead American plan to have access to Central Asian Oil through Afghan-Pakistan corridor will get currency in the coming days.

Pakistan is at a cross-roads. So is India. If Islamabad fails to fall in line chalked by America dismembering of Pakistan will be the logical culmination. The first dismembering in 1971—liberation of Bangladesh—was possible because of the Indo-Soviet Friendship Treaty, rather a military pact, which thwarted American move on behalf of Pakistan. Ironically, the second dismemberment may take place because of America's reverse role. If Pakistan gets disintegrated at this juncture, spill-over impact on India where more than a dozen insurgencies are fighting the state machinery will be disastrous, both economically and politically.

Hysteria about 'terrorism' is so deep-rooted that American hegemony in the region is a closed chapter even on the left agenda. It's no longer about what America does. Nor does anybody think about what America can do. The enemy consists of jihadists based in Pakistan while progressives and democrats feel reluctant to expose American war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan. After Middle East, South Asia is becoming the next flash-point. The blood-bath in Sri Lanka is affecting India's political scenario, particularly in the South, in no minor way while Nepal is far from normal despite a maoist government in Kathmandu. The problem is South Asians don't really know what they are really getting from America. Nor do they think twice about how they have gotten into the quagmire. □□□